Will's Wisdom: Limiting Factors in Food Production

POSTED BY WILL HARRIS

DEC 14, 2020 7:32:05 PM

I was an industrial cattle rancher for 20 years. My upbringing prepared me to operate my farm in an industrialized, commoditized way. My education taught me a reductive, linear farming method.

I am one of the few good-old-boys who went rogue and became part of the leadership of the regenerative and humane farm movement. I started making that transition 25 years ago.

However, the leaders in the centralized, industrialized, and commoditized farming industry are still my neighbors, relatives, and friends.

We still talk, and we talk about agriculture, the environment, and food production. The conversation usually goes something like this:

“Well, Will, farming like you do is fine… It's okay. But you *know* that you can't feed the world farming like that.”

I love it when they say that.

I respond with, “Well… Let's take a minute and have that discussion. But, before we have it, **let's both agree to stipulate that the world has a finite and limited carrying capacity.** We cannot exponentially increase the population, in perpetuity, and expect the Earth to feed all of us.

Sooner or later, the resources will be depleted. The water, land, and air will become overly polluted. To feed us, the system will have to become so big that it will collapse upon itself. Can we agree that, at some point, this will happen if we have unlimited population growth?"

They do not want to agree to this stipulation. They will try to tell me that technology will continue to make food from air.

But, if I ruthlessly persist, they will have to relent and acknowledge this simple and undeniable truth: **the linear food production system, pushed to the extreme, will eventually and inevitably fail us.**

When they do make this one small concession, I thank them for being open minded. Then I reciprocate by immediately admitting to them that **their industrial, commodity, centralized system will feed a greater world population than my regenerative and compassionate methods**.

If… the resource that becomes the limiting factor for our survival is the *acres of land that are*

available for food production.

But…

1. If the supply of fossil fuel becomes the limiting factor, my system is best. **I don't use as much.**
2. If the fish killing dead seas become the limiting factor, my system is best. **I don't pollute in that way.**
3. If diminished resources of phosphorus, potash, and other reductive inputs become the limiting factor, my system is best. **I don't use them.**
4. If the aquifer runs dry, my system is best. **I don't deplete it.**
5. If aberrant genes escape from GMO crops, I win. **I don't use them.**
6. If drug-resistant strains of pathogens become the limiting factor, I win. **I don't contribute to those mutations.**
7. If the loss of topsoil becomes the limiting factor, I win. **I build topsoil.**
8. If a pandemic causes the centralized, industrialized processing plants to shut down and the food chain to fail, I win. **I don't need them.**
9. If climate change becomes the limiting factor, I win. **I mitigate climate change.**

There are a lot more of these, but you get my point.

The only scenario in which, in the long view, their system is better than mine, is efficiency and productivity per acre of land.

There is NO resiliency in the centralized, commoditized, industrialized food production system. **ALL of the resiliency was traded for efficiency**. It was a real bad trade.

In every other scenario, my regenerative, humane, resilient production system is better. For people, animals, and planet.

Want more? Subscribe Here!

Want more? Subscribe Here!

Sign up to get farm news, cooking tips, and more. Plus, be the first to know about online store discounts and new products!

First Name

Last Name

Email*

SUBSCRIBE

→ Return to Blog Home

Keep reading about our three core values:

Regenerative Agriculture • Animal Welfare • Rural Revival

For cooking tips and original recipes, check out our recipe blog:

Grassfed & Pastured Recipes

Dan Buglione

12/22/2020, 7:05:11 AM

Thank you for being a voice of reason. Greed and fear seem to be the motivation for the world of today. We need to go back to what our ancestors taught us. Respect the land, animals and nature. Build and preserve what has been given. Leave this world knowing you did no harm.
Simple yet so complex today
Regards
Dan Buglione

Sarah V

12/22/2020, 7:09:08 AM

Very well written and complete truth. Thank you for speaking truth in an upside down world and educating farmers. Even if one of them begins practicing regenerative and humane farming it'll be worth it for planet, animals and future generations.

Anthony Nagle

12/22/2020, 11:59:03 AM

I've worked in the hotel industry as an executive, specifically food and beverage service, for over 2 decades. I was blind to the engine that supplies that sector and really, the majority of our food supply. I am huge proponent and admirer of the work Will Harris and White Oak Pastures (WOP) is doing.

Will acknowledges, it's been a 25 year journey. As a parent and well, a human, I am concerned about the current trajectory of today's societal norms and practices. Time is not on our side. What future are we creating for the following generations? We need more WOP out there!

With some concern of sounding like a hypocrite, how do we scale the model being employed by WOP?

Will - what is the path to convert more of your neighbours to a regenerative approach to agriculture? Can portions of your business be segmented off and run by industry partners vs. big, industrialized ag? Example, could there be regional abattoirs to support smaller ranchers or those not wanting to manage the full vertical that WOP does today? And could these ranchers be sustainable if only participating in certain segments of the vertical?

TL:DR - Is it an all or nothing venture?

I've worked in the hotel industry, specifically food and beverage service, for over 2 decades. I was blind to the engine that supplies that sector and really, the majority of our food supply. I am huge proponent and admirer of the work Will Harris and White Oak Pastures (WOP) is doing.

Will acknowledges, it's been a 25 year journey. As parent and well, a human, I am concerned about the current trajectory of today's societal norms and practices. Specifically, time is not on our side. What future are creating for the following generations. We need more WOP out there!

With some concern of sounding like a hypocrite, how do we scale the model being followed by WOP? Will - what is the path to convert more of your neighbours to a regenerative approach to agriculture? Can segments of your business be segmented off and run by industry vs. big, industrialized ag? Example, could there be regional abattoirs to support smaller rancher or those not wanting to manage the full vertical that WOP does today? And could they be sustainable if only participating in certain segments?

TL:DR - Is it an all or nothing venture?

Thank you

Louisiana Miller

5/14/2021, 5:13:40 AM

Thanks for this informative blog.

Isla John

6/16/2021, 1:05:24 AM

I have read your blogs its awesome

Tex Hooper

12/21/2022, 5:51:26 PM

You make a great point about building topsoil. That seems like a good way to produce the best kind of fruit. I'll have to consider getting a food service that has good quality control for production.

© 2021 White Oak Pastures